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published in
Studies in Philosophy and Education
2000

DOI (link to publisher)
10.1007/bf02764150

document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Studies in Philosophy and Education **19:** 21–37, 2000.

Context and Interaction. How to Assess Dewey's Influence on Educational Reform in Europe?

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Abstract. This article addresses some methodological questions that are at stake in assessing the influence of the ideas of John Dewey on the renewal of European education in the twentieth century, using examples from the history of Dutch education. It is argued that in this kind of research the focus should not be on the process of influence as such, but rather on the activity of reception. This, in turn, requires a contextual reconstruction of the interaction between Deweyan ideas and practices and existing ones. The case studies presented in this article exemplify the more general methodological observations. They not only provide an insight in the role of Deweyan ideas and practices in the development of Dutch education but also make clear for what reasons, mostly unrelated to the significance of Dewey's work, these ideas and practices did not have any lasting influence on the development of Dutch education, both on the level of early childhood education and primary and secondary schools.

In 1950 the *Christelijk Pedagogisch Studiecentrum* (Christian Centre for the Study of Education), a Dutch organisation which, among other things, provided in-service training for teachers, published a brochure entitled *Moderne opvattingen omtrent het 'leren denken' contra 'Herbart'* (Modern views about 'learning how to think' contra 'Herbart') (Wielenga, 1950). In this brochure its author, G. Wielenga, a professor of education at the Free University of Amsterdam, made a comparison between the views of Herbart and Dewey, clearly arguing in favour of the latter's approach. The brochure was apparently used in one of the in-service courses. Moreover, the copy we found several years ago in a second-hand bookshop contained pencil marks, which suggests that someone has actually read the booklet. Perhaps it was a teacher, and perhaps his or her teaching was affected by the way in which he or she not only was able to understand Dewey's views about learning 'how to think,' but even more, to relate to them and incorporate some of these views into his or her own teaching. If this is an accurate description of what has actually happened, we would then not only have an example of the reception of Dewey's ideas in Dutch education but also some evidence for his influence on Dutch educational practice.

Introduction

One of the more complex issues in intellectual history in general and the history of education in particular, is the question of authorship, influence and reception. As the example above suggests, this issue cannot simply be dealt with on the level of the history of ideas. If we want to claim that ideas have had an impact and were actually received, we must be willing to descend to the very mundane level of the day to day educational practice.

But even if we take such an approach many questions are not immediately answered. It is one thing to observe that a teacher has read about the ideas of some educator; it is quite another to establish the extent to which this has actually influenced his or her own teaching. It is one thing to recognise ideas in educational policy documents; it's quite another to determine whether this counts as a case of influence. And even when the actual "mechanisms" can be traced, complex questions about interpretation and the correctness of interpretation remain. Did Wielenga give an accurate account of Dewey's position? Did the teacher who read Wielenga's brochure understand Dewey correctly? And more generally, what would be the measure for a correct interpretation of Dewey – provided that "Dewey" refers to a stable and definable position in the first place (on the issue of [mis]interpretation see, for example, Oelkers, 1993; Petrovic, 1998)?

In the following pages we want to address some of the methodological caveats that are at stake in dealing with questions about influence and reception, and, more specifically, the influence and reception of Dewey's ideas on educational reform in Europe. Rather than drawing the broad picture of Dewey's influence at large on the renewal of European education, we will present several small-scale case studies – taken from our recent investigations into the role of Dewey in the development of Dutch education[1] – in order to show *what* can be said about these issues and, even more importantly, *how* this can be said. This, so we hope, should give an indication of what might be more relevant questions in assessing Dewey's influence on the renewal of European education.

Dewey and European "New Education"

Many authors have tried to assess the role Dewey's ideas have played in the renewal of education that took place in the first half of this century (see, for example, Kandel, 1929; Kilpatrick, 1939; Brickman, 1949, 1975; Tsuin-Chen, 1970; Passow, 1982; Oelkers, 1993; Donoso, 1994; Büyükdüvenci, 1995; Biesta and Miedema, 1996; Brehony, 1997). This renewal – which is known under such names as "progressive education," "New Education," "Reformpädagogik," "reformpedagogiek," and "Education nouvelle" – was clearly an international phenomenon (see, for example, Röhrs and Lenhart, 1995). Although Dewey's place in the canon of what in the American context is known as progressive education is not as straightforward as some have claimed it to be (like, for example, Albjerg Graham, 1971, p. 249; see Dewey, 1938 for his own estimate of the issue; see also Röhrs, 1977,

p. 16; Biesta and Miedema, 1996, p. 4; Biesta and Miedema, 1999), there can be no doubt that Dewey was one of the key figures in this process of educational renewal, both in the USA and elsewhere.

Having said this, it should be stressed that determining the actual influence of Dewey's ideas on the renewal of education outside of the USA is far less easy than it may appear to be.[2] It is also far more complex than many of those who have written about Dewey's influence abroad seem to have acknowledged.[3] And even before we ask how to assess Dewey's influence, we must raise the question in what way and to what extent the notion of "influence" has any explanatory power at all (see Brehony, 1997, pp. 428–429). What kind of insights do we actually gain from the conclusion that someone has had an influence on educational thought or educational practice? To address these questions we will have a look at an example of what might best be called an "encounter" between Dewey's ideas and a paradigm case of "New Education" in Europe. This is the case of the "Dutch Pestalozzi" (Peeters, 1916, p. 161), the educator and educationalist Jan Ligthart.

"A Supporter in America"

Jan Ligthart (1859–1916) was principal of a state funded elementary school in the Tullinghstraat in the Hague from 1885 until his death in 1916. In this very school Ligthart practised and developed his ideas about education – or to be more precise: his ideas about a new form of education, a renewal of the approach to education that was common in Dutch schools at that time (see Ligthart 1918a, 1918b, 1931).

Ligthart's educational approach was based on two principles: to bring real life in its entirety into the classroom, and to promote the active participation of the child in the learning process. Ligthart strongly opposed verbalism. He argued that children do not learn by listening but by doing. It therefore doesn't make sense, so he claimed, to tell children that wheat and sugar beet grow on clay soil and rye on sandy soil if the child neither knows what sugar beets, wheat and rye are, nor what the difference between clay and sandy soil might be. Children must have first hand experience of these things, and this first hand experience should be the centre of the learning process. Arithmetic, reading and writing should only come in second place, i.e., in their functional relationship to experience. The school should therefore first of all be a place where life in its entirety can be experienced. Ligthart further stressed the importance of interaction with other children and with adults. He claimed that it was only through such interaction that children would learn to work together and live together, and it would only be in this way that children would be adequately prepared for an active and constructive participation in society.

Ligthart's approach to education was not only motivated by his views on the process of learning. Even more central was his conviction that life itself is a unity and that, for that very reason life must be represented in education as a whole. Ligthart was highly critical of the common division of the curriculum into subjects

since such a division would not correspond with the unity and coherence that is characteristic of real life. And since it is the task of the school to prepare children for taking part in real life, the school should give the child the opportunity to come into contact with all aspects of life and society – not in fragments but in its unity and integrity.

Ligthart's school in the Tullinghstraat attracted a lot of foreign attention. The school was visited by key figures in the internal reform of education, such as Ellen Key (in 1905), A.U. Zelenko (in 1910), and Edouard Claparède (in 1912), and also by teachers from many different countries. Those familiar with Dewey's ideas and with the work of the Laboratory School in Chicago often noted the striking similarities between Dewey's approach and Ligthart's. In his introduction to the first French translation of Dewey's *School and Society* Claparède for example wrote that Dewey has surely more followers than he probably knows. Among them surely "Ligthart, the brilliant and evenly sympathetic Dutch educator who would, without restriction, subscribe to all his ideas" (our translation, see Claparède, 1913, p. 30).[4] More recently it has even been suggested that Dewey actually was one of Ligthart's "guiding lights" (Imelman and Meijer, 1986, p. 87).

Through the years Ligthart himself became aware of the striking similarities between his work and Dewey's. However, if we are to believe Ligthart – and we see no reason why we should not believe him in this instance – there is no ground to conclude that Ligthart was ever *influenced* by Dewey. In his periodical *School en Leven* (*School and Life*) Ligthart wrote about a group of Russian educators who visited his school (this was presumably in 1907). Ligthart's Russian visitors had previously been in Chicago, where they had visited the Laboratory School, and in New York. They drew Ligthart's attention to the similarities between his work and Dewey's and suggested that he should make further inquiries with Dewey (see Ligthart, 1908, p. 609).

Ligthart apparently never did this, but when in 1908 he read about Dewey in a book by the Belgian educationalist Omer Buyse (Buyse, 1908), he was immediately struck by the similarities between his own ideas and Dewey's. There was, he wrote, "indeed a remarkable similarity to our ideas of 'total life'. (. . .) The ideas were similar in many aspects, especially the main idea, that of learning by doing." (Ligthart, 1908, p. 610; our translation). Ligthart stressed, however, that the similarities were purely coincidental. His account of Dewey, so he writes, was only meant to show "how the teachers-instinct has *driven* this writer into the same direction as the professor seems to have *chosen* after lengthy consideration" (ibid., p. 673; our translation).[5] Ligthart used Dewey to make clear how his own principle of bringing real life into the classroom could be realised in practice. But this was all he had to say about his "ally from America." For he concludes: "And this ends the case, until a supporter shows up in Australia. Or on the South Pole!" (ibid., p. 712; our translation).

From Influence to Reception

The "encounter" between Dewey and Ligthart clearly reveals that the existence of a strong similarity between two sets of ideas and/or practices is not enough to conclude that the one has influenced the other. In his article on the alleged "undeniable" and "disastrous" influence of Dewey on English education,[6] Brehony refers to the work of Quentin Skinner, "a prominent critic of the use of influence as an explanatory device in the history of ideas" (Brehony, 1997, p. 429). Skinner argues that there are three conditions that must be met in order to conclude that the appearance of a given set of ideas in a text may be explained by their appearance in the text of an earlier writer. First of all there must be a genuine similarity. Further, it must be the case that the ideas in the later text could not be found in the work of any other writer but the one said to have influence. And finally the probability of the similarity being random should be very low (see ibid.). While Ligthart's case does meet the first condition, it is evident that it fails to meet the second and third ones. The latter conditions do suggest, however, a different explanation of the similarities between Ligthart and Dewey, which, as we will argue, also sheds a different light on the question of the relevance of the very idea of influence.

Skinner's point is that we are only allowed to speak of influence if we can trace a direct, exclusive and unidirectional connection between one set of ideas and another. Yet if one thing stands out in the history of "New Education" it is the fact that similar ideas and practices were around in many different and apparently unrelated contexts. Rather than assuming that these similarities all stem from the same single origin, many authors have suggested that the international character of "New Education" should be explained with reference to wider, more encompassing developments in the western world – or, since the renewal also took place in non-western countries such as India, China, and Japan, with reference to wider developments in the modern world, the modern education system, and modern educational thought (see Oelkers, 1989, p. 16).

Röhrs, for example, has argued that the international character of "New Education" has to be understood as the effect of the ubiquity of the ideas of central figures in modern educational thought, such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Herbart (see Röhrs, 1977, pp. 9–10, 1994, pp. 48–49). Others have explained the international character of "New Education" with reference to processes of "modernisation."[7] Scheibe considers "New Education" to be a *critical reaction* to the excrescences of the modernisation of society in general and education in particular (see Scheibe, 1971). Tenorth (1994), on the other hand, has stressed the extent to which the renewal of education can be understood as a modernisation of education and, in this sense, as *part of* the modernisation process. Ullrich (1990), finally, has argued for the *paradoxical character* of the relationship between "New Education" and modernisation, stressing the fact that it combined an outer modernisation of education (viz., the deliberate improvement of educational processes and their conditions) with an inner de-modernisation (viz., its reliance on notions of "community" or "real life").

If we reflect on the case of Jan Ligthart from this perspective we can conclude, first of all, that it is quite unlikely that the similarities between Ligthart and Dewey were *not* random (Skinner's third criterion). The ideas that informed their educational practices were, so to speak, "in the air." This makes it unlikely that Dewey has actually influenced Ligthart. It also suggests – and this, so we want to argue, is of crucial importance for the whole issue of influence – that Dewey's position should not so much be understood as an original source that influenced others, but should primarily be seen as one position among others in the renewal of education.[8] While Dewey is without doubt an important 'factor' in this renewal, he is at the very same time an 'effect' of the developments from which this renewal emerged. In this respect Dewey and Ligthart stand on the same level.

As soon, therefore, as we bring the more encompassing framework of the renewal of education into view, it becomes clear that the concept of "influence" has only a very limited explanatory power. If any, it only plays a role *within* the more general developments. From this we should not conclude, however, that Dewey's work has not played any role at all in the renewal of education. It only means that the perspective of "influence" is hardly adequate to bring this contribution into vision. What if we approach this question from the other side and instead focus on the *reception* of Dewey's ideas?

Interaction and Context

In their book on the history of public school reform in the United States, *Tinkering toward Utopia*, Tyack and Cuban observe that in thinking about educational reform people usually only ask how reforms change schools. They stress, however, that innovations never enter educational institutions "with the previous slate wiped clean" (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 83). A technological and top-down approach "slights the many ways in which schools shape reforms and teachers employ their 'wisdom of practice' " to produce what they call "pedagogical hybrids" (ibid.). Instead, therefore, of asking how reforms change schools, Tyack and Cuban argue that we should ask the reverse question, which is *how schools change reforms* (ibid., p. 60).

While this shift of attention may go against our initial intuitions, we want to suggest that it represents the more realistic point of view. It is the rare reform, as Tyack and Cuban put it, "that performs and persists precisely according to plan" (ibid., p. 60). What their case studies make clear is that for the most part reforms become assimilated to previous patterns of schooling – patterns that have remained remarkably stable over the decades, especially the pattern to which they refer as the "grammar of schooling," i.e., the grammar that organises the central work of the school (see ibid., pp. 84–85). Educational reforms, then, have rarely simply replaced what there is, but have, more commonly "added complexity" (ibid., p. 83).

We may want to push this conclusion one step further. What the investigations by Tyack and Cuban reveal, is that if a reform initiative is to have any effect at all, it needs to be taken up by and incorporated into existing educational practices. Since it is more than likely that in this process the 'original' reform initiative will change, we may well argue that this change is a more or less necessary change – that is, if there is to be any effect of the reform initiative at all.[9] Educational reform, to put it differently, only exists as *re*-form, that is, as a reconstruction of an existing situation with which it interacts in a variety of different ways (see especially ibid., chapters 3 and 4).

If we transpose these insights to the issue of influence – and more specifically Dewey's influence on educational reform in Europe – it becomes clear that the search for the existence of undistorted and uncontaminated Deweyan ideas and practices is at the very least unproductive, and presumably, so we want to argue, simply the wrong thing to look for. If we want to learn anything about Dewey's influence – and for reasons that by now will be clear this might better be referred to as the *interaction* between Dewey and European education – we must focus on the ways in which his ideas have been discussed, have been used, have been transformed, and, to use that Deweyan term, have been reconstructed. The focus should therefore be on the "digestion" of Dewey's ideas. This not only requires that we provide an account of the ways in which educators and educationalists have tried to come to an understanding of Dewey's work from the perspective of and in interaction with their own point of view. It also requires an understanding of the *contexts* in which this interaction took place (see also Konrad, 1998, pp. 40–41).

In the following pages we will therefore examine three examples of explicit and positive interest in Dewey's work. Our cases date from the first decades after the second World War, an era in which one of the central questions facing Dutch educators was whether the future of education could and should be similar to the (segregated) way in which it had been organised before the second World War, or whether a new orientation was needed.

Wielenga and Dutch Reformed Education

The central figure in the first case is G. Wielenga, professor of education at the Free University of Amsterdam, a Dutch Reformed institution for higher education which was founded in 1880 and which was an important part of the Dutch Reformed "pillar" in Dutch society. The denominational segregation or "pillarisation" of Dutch society was the outcome of a struggle for emancipation by Protestants and Roman Catholics which became most prominent in the second half of the 19th century (see Lijphart, 1975). Education was one of the central issues in this struggle, since both groups wanted to have their own religion-based curriculum. The struggle for educational autonomy and authority went hand in hand, however, with a struggle for a more general social, political and economic emancipation. The struggle for emancipation was successful to the extent that from the 1920s

onwards (and at least until the 1960s) almost all societal institutions and organisations (such as schools and universities, political parties, trade unions, health care institutions, radio and television, leisure activities) were organised *and* segregated along denominational lines (see also De Ruyter and Miedema, 2000).[10]

Wielenga, whose work was primarily engaged with Christian elementary and secondary education, played a major role in the Christian Centre for the Study of Education (*Christelijk Pedagogisch Studiecentrum*). Centres like this one were established and funded by the Ministry of Education, and were meant to act as an intermediary between universities and schools. Their role was to provide practical ideas and guidelines for educational innovation and to support innovation in the schools.

In a series of articles that were published from 1946 onwards, Wielenga had expressed a very positive interest in Dewey's work on psychological, didactical and more general educational questions related to the issue of learning how to think. Wielenga's praise for Dewey was, in a sense, remarkable. Already in 1926 one of the key figures of the Dutch Reformed educational pillar, Jan Waterink (the first professor on education at the Free University) had published a devastating critique of Dewey's position (Waterink, 1926). Waterink was especially critical of Dewey's anti-foundationalism. For him this was the main reason to argue for a complete rejection of Dewey's ideas. In Dewey's conception, so he wrote, "there is no place left for the Idea, for fixed principles as the basis for the educational action." Waterink claimed that Christian educational theory could provide just such principles. For that reason it should be preferred over Dewey's "radically social theory of education" (see Waterink, 1926). In his early publications on Dewey, Wielenga did not touch upon those parts of Dewey's work that – from the Dutch Reformed perspective – were considered to be most problematic. It was not until 1953 that he took issue with them, most explicitly in his inaugural lecture (see Wielenga, 1953a, 1953b).

Wielenga's lecture can be read as an attempt to legitimise his adoption of Dewey's psychological and educational ideas while at the same time rejecting Dewey's view on religion and the religious (his "humanistic" philosophy of life). Although the lecture contains a summary of Waterink's views on the issue – it seems to convince his (Dutch reformed) audience that he is aware of the problems that have been raised in the tradition – it is clear from the outset that he does not want to follow Waterink. Wielenga rather wants to create a space for a kind of "half-way" adoption of Dewey's thought. He does so by introducing a distinction between "philosophical starting and ending points" or "teleological conceptions" on the one hand, and "intermediary goals" on the other. Wielenga argues that intermediary goals must be first reached. These "limited goals" thus serve as means by which to attain the final goal. "A route is defined not only by the starting and terminal points," so Wielenga argues, "but also by the possibilities offered by the terrain which lies between. Thus the factual, psychological, social,

and other circumstances of the 'terrain' play a large role in helping to define the course of action of the school" (Wielenga, 1953b, p. 247).

Wielenga stresses that "both one's philosophy of life and the empirical data [therefore] determine especially the choice, arrangement, accentuation, interpretation, form, and presentation of the subject-matter" (ibid.). It is for this reason "that in the area of teaching, although the points of departure and the goals may be worlds apart, (. . .) the courses of action often and in significant respects run parallel" (ibid.).

> The criterion for a path is whether it is safely passable and whether it leads to our goal, and not who first explored it and laid it out. Therefore in laying out a course of action for the school one can make good use of the services of an expert in this field, even though he may hold to a different final purpose. I do not mean to say that one should blindly follow his advice or his plan of action, not even in part. A system ought to form a whole into which the subsidiary units fit organically (ibid.).

What becomes clear from Wielenga's lecture is that he tries to find a place for Dewey's ideas about the process of education within his own, more encompassing religious framework, and that he tries to provide legitimacy for this manoeuvre. It is important to note that in doing so Wielenga does *not* rely on the traditional distinction whereby psychology is considered to be the provider of the means of education and philosophy or theology is responsible for the aims and ends. Wielenga claims that Dewey's ideas can play a role in the area of teaching in that they can both provide the means and the (intermediate) ends of education.[11]

It is in this respect that the case of Wielenga provides an interesting example of the way the interaction between existing ideas (Wielenga's Dutch reformed framework) and new ideas (Dewey's). Interestingly enough Wielenga himself acknowledges that the reception of Dewey's ideas can neither consist of simply adopting the whole Deweyan system as it is, nor of just picking out some useful elements. "(O)ne cannot simply incorporate into one's system elements borrowed from another system," he writes, "they must fit into it!" (ibid.). For Wielenga the *interaction* with existing ideas – ideas that in the specific context of Dutch Reformed education, had a rather special status – is the *conditio sine qua non* for any possible influence of Dewey's thought on existing theory and practice.

Van der Velde and the Comprehensive Approach to Schooling

Another Dutch educationalist who was very positive about Dewey's work was I. van der Velde. Van der Velde was an associate professor at the centre for educational studies ("Nutsseminarium voor Pedagogiek") of the City University of Amsterdam. Here he conducted research into language acquisition and language education. He also taught courses in the philosophy and history of education.

In 1968 Van der Velde published a book entitled *Kind, school, samenleving* [Child, school, society], together with Van Gelder. One of the chapters, written

by Van der Velde, was entitled “Opvoedend onderwijs” [Educative schooling] and was entirely devoted to Dewey’s views. Contrary to prevailing interpretations of Dewey’s conception of education as being a 100% social theory of education, Van der Velde argued that Dewey was concerned both with the individual and with society, and, more specifically, with the interaction between the two. Dewey had an open eye for “the individual’s fully personal singularity.” “Being an individual,” so Van der Velde argued following Dewey, “is even a necessity to be able to serve the community” (Van der Velde, 1968, p. 42).

Van der Velde claimed that in this respect Dewey’s position came quite close to that of the most renowned educationalist in post-war Dutch academic education, M.J. Langeveld. Although Langeveld was himself a Christian, he had come to the conclusion that the only way forwards for Dutch education after the Second World War would be along comprehensive lines. For that reason Langeveld endorsed the de-pillarisation of education. On the level of academic educational theory he had himself contributed to this development by means of a theory of education along phenomenological-hermeneutical lines, starting from the “common ground” of the phenomenon of education, and not from first (denominational) principles (see Langeveld, 1945; see also Miedema and Biesta, 1989).

Van der Velde also argued for the de-pillarisation of Dutch post-war education, observing that in several areas, including the domain of morality, there did already exist “shared convictions” between Christians and Humanists (see ibid., p. 31). Referring to Dewey, Van der Velde emphasised the importance of *interaction* – the relationship between one person and another – and of *intercommunication*, i.e., the relationship between the individual and society. He argued that from the perspective of intercommunication the autonomy of the school should be limited by the “vital interests of the state” (ibid., pp. 38, 41). At the height of Dutch pillarisation, however, the state was only allowed to lay down general criteria for denominational schools. The denominational pillars did not want to have any state interference in educational matters.

In the sixties Dutch society started to de-pillarise at an increasingly rapid pace. Within the educational pillars there emerged a recognition of the dysfunctionality of pillared education. Some came to see that it was due to the exclusive attention to ideological and idealistic issues that the necessary innovation of education had almost completely been neglected (see Kuiper, 1970, p. 31).

The sixties showed a growing tendency towards the development of a more encompassing perspective on schooling. Issues that were brought to the fore included the organisation of the schools along more democratic lines (here Dewey was a source of inspiration (see Wielenga, 1970, pp. 55–56)), the importance of a longitudinal organisation of the curriculum for children from 5 to 14 years old (“Nieuwe onderwijsvormen”, 1965), and the need to interpret educational innovations as a societal issue that must be systematically analysed both on the level of the system of education itself, and with respect to the larger social context in which schools function (see Van Gelder, 1968, pp. 7–8; Van Gelder, 1974a, 1974b).

Both the transformations that took place in Dutch society and the ideas that emerged from the field of education and educational theory suggest that in the second half of the sixties Dutch education was more or less "ready" for Deweyan ideas. Moreover, the writings of Van der Velde and his colleagues and the earlier work by Wielenga had made Dewey's ideas available to the larger educational community. It was, however, precisely at this juncture in time that dramatic changes in the context took place. Educationalists in special education and curriculum studies took inspiration from the findings of German and Anglo-American empirical studies. Their preference for 'hard boiled' educational research was reinforced by the philosophical ideas of the German educational theorist Wolfgang Brezinka, whose work was inspired by the ideas of Popper (see Brezinka, 1967, 1969, 1971). As a result the fighting flared up between those in favour of a value free, objective empirical paradigm for educational science, and the adherents of the phenomenological-hermeneutical ('geesteswetenschappelijk') approach along the lines of Langeveld (see Miedema, 1986). The ensuing 'paradigm wars' took up most of the time of Dutch educationalists for well over a decade. Precisely this, so we believe, held them back from actively pursuing the Deweyan approach to education and schooling.

C. Philippi-Siewertz van Reesema

While the reception of Dewey's ideas in main stream Dutch education did not really have any lasting effects, his work was an important and influential point of reference in the field of kindergarten education. The key figure in this case is C. Philippi-Siewertz van Reesema who first wrote about Dewey in her extensive study on American educational "pioneers" and the way in which they had developed their educational philosophy and their school-systems (see Philippi, 1949, p. 597). Philippi's book was commissioned by the Dutch government in 1940. She was asked to do the study because of her expertise on early childhood education, which had become manifest in the extensive work that she had done in the decades before the Second World War.

Although Philippi didn't have a university degree, she was well educated. After secondary school she took courses in philosophy, history and sociology at the University of Leiden (the Netherlands), courses in physiology and child psychology in Lausanne (Switzerland), and a course on theories of heredity at the Technical University of Delft (the Netherlands). She had contacts with Alfred Binet in Paris, and visited the schools where he conducted his research on intelligence and heredity. In 1911 she contributed to the first Paedological Conference in Brussels (Belgium), which was organised by Ovide Decroly (about whom she wrote a book in 1931; see Philippi, 1931). Philippi also visited famous developmental psychologists and educationalists of her time (such as the Sterns, the Bühlers, Köhler, Claparède, Lewin). She further took a course with Piaget and wrote the first book on Piaget in Dutch (Philippi, 1929).

When in 1917 the Dutch Montessori Association was founded, Philippi was asked to become a member of the board. In 1918 she became responsible for the first training course for Montessori kindergarten teachers in The Hague. A year later a second independent training centre was established in Amsterdam. After attending a course given by Montessori in London in 1919, Philippi published her comments on Montessori's dogmatic and strict use of educational tools and of the so-called 'sensitive periods'. Though she still based her work on Montessori's views, she explicitely preferred Montessori's first non-dogmatic writings which put an emphasis on the trust of the teacher in the freedom, the self-activation, the concentrated attention and the self-discipline of the child. Since the Amsterdam centre followed Montessori's strict line, the Dutch Montessori movement split (see for this biographical information Singer, 1991; Philippi, 1954).

Instead of simply repeating the established views of Fröbel and Montessori, Philippi tried to develop an up-to-date research program for child study and an approach to early childhood education sustained by empirical observations of children. She brought new materials into the school (bricks, paint, drawing materials, boxes, and planks) – for which reason she was criticised as being a follower of Dewey and Ligthart (see Singer, 1991, p. 110).

Philippi's 1949 book contains an extremely well documented chapter on Dewey's philosophy of education and its influence on schooling and edification more generally. Philippi especially praises Dewey's contributions to the education of young children (e.g., in his *The School and the Child*; see Philippi, 1949, p. 379). Philippi explicitly endorses Dewey's experimental, observational and experiential approach, his contention that nursery and infant school should not be separate but ought to be part of a comprehensive school system, and his genetic psychology which she perceived as being an (implicit) critique of formal learning (Fröbel; Herbart) and the formal approach to educational tools (Montessori) (see ibid., p. 385).[12] With the help of a research grant from the Dutch Foundation for Pure Research (ZWO), Philippi wrote a book on the world of the infant and infant education (see Philippi, 1954), again making use of Deweyan ideas.

Students of Philippi, such as W. Nijkamp, became very influential in the field of infant education and teacher training for infant educators. They sustained Philippi's positive reception of Dewey's ideas and wrote about him in a similar vein as Philippi had done. An example of this can be found in Nijkamp's handbook for students at teachers colleges for infant education that first appeared in 1962, which was reprinted in its original form at least until the early 70s (see Nijkamp, 1962). Another influential figure in Dutch infant education, A. Stoll (who had followed courses with Waterink and positioned herself explicitly as a Christian educator), also paid positive attention to Dewey in her handbook for students at Christian infant teacher colleges (see Stoll, 1948, 1968). All in all it seems that Dewey's ideas had a real impact on Dutch infant education in kindergarten classrooms.

What this case may reveal about the question of reception, interaction and context, only becomes clear when we add to its description the fact that the

influence of Dewey's work on kindergarten education went almost completely unnoticed. This was not only because this reception of Dewey's ideas took place in circles that were disconnected from mainstream (academic) education. It was also because from the latter point of view kindergarten education was considered to be quite marginal. As Singer (1991, pp. 114–115) points out, university professors in general did not deal with infant education at all, mainly because they thought of it as a preparation for "real" education, and not as "real" education itself. For that reason they only paid attention to elementary and secondary schooling.

To this came the fact that infant education was considered to be the domain of women who almost by definition were not seen as belonging to the academic milieu. Even those university professors who were advisors for Philippi's projects and who had apparently read her work, never referred to it. When in the late sixties early childhood education at last became of academic interest, researchers (mainly from developmental psychology) found their references and sources of inspiration in academic circles and did not turn to the whole body of knowledge and experience that could be found in the work of individuals who had dealt with infant education outside of the university, such as Philippi. As Singer (1991, p. 116) makes clear, a similar pattern can be found the US and England. While infant teachers were the first who carried out research into early childhood development and education, their work was largely ignored and characterised as 'layperson's work' by the 'real' scientists who came after them (see also Singer, 1989, pp. 110–181).

Concluding Remarks

In the preceding pages we have made some methodological observations on issues that are at stake in assessing Dewey's influence on the renewal of European education, using examples from the history of twentieth century Dutch education. We have argued that in this kind of research the focus should not be on the *process* of influence as such, but rather on the *activity* of reception. From this it follows that if we want to gain any understanding of the role of Dewey's ideas in the renewal of education, we should not look for the existence of undistorted and uncontaminated Deweyan ideas and practices. The activity of reception entails an *interaction* between existing traditions, ideas, and practices and input from the 'outside' – which implies that change will be the rule and continuity the exception. Interaction always brings with it questions about *context*, since it is the specific context in which ideas and practices are received which is of a decisive influence on the way in which these ideas and practices are taken up, digested, translated, transformed and eventually made into something new. It is, moreover, only on this level that it becomes possible to explain why, e.g., despite the manifest influence of Dewey on the thought of prominent educationalists this did not result in any tangible influence on educational practice. This is, at least, what our examples from the developments in the Netherlands indicate. While Dewey's ideas were not only well known in some circles but appear to have been integrated into existing traditions, there were

other factors, unrelated to the quality or significance of Dewey's ideas, that exerted a decisive influence on the eventual course of events. In the case of Wielenga and Van der Velde it was the emergence of a rather scientistic approach to empirical research which blocked discussions about the future development of Dutch schools and focused attention for many years on a meta-theoretical 'paradigm war' between empirical and hermeneutical educational research. The case of Philippi reveals the important role that a cluster of social and intellectual factors (status, gender, disciplinary priorities, and conceptions about 'real' education) played in the almost total disappearance of a whole body of work in early childhood education. All this suggests, in our opinion, that the study of Dewey's influence on the renewal of European education should first and foremost be based upon contextual reconstructions of processes of interaction and transformation. It is only on the basis of a rich body of such contextual case studies that it might become possible to address the next step, i.e., the question about more general European trends, in an adequate way.

Notes

[1] In earlier publications we dealt with some aspects of the influence of Dewey on Dutch education (see Biesta and Miedema, 1987; Miedema and Biesta, 1989; Biesta, 1992; Biesta and Miedema, 1996). In this paper we not only present new findings about Dewey and Dutch education; these findings also urged upon us the need to rethink our previous interpretations.

[2] The same can be said about Dewey's influence on the renewal of American education (see, e.g., Jackson, 1990).

[3] Passow, e.g., seems to assume that that the mere existence of translations of Dewey's work in a given country will automatically lead to the use of Dewey's ideas (see Passow, 1982, p. 409).

[4] Claparède apparently was an important figure in the dissemination of Dewey's ideas. He was the author of the first study on Dewey to appear in Mexico [Claparède, E. (1926). La pedagogía de John Dewey. Mexico: Sociedad de Edición y Libreria Fanco-Americana]. Two years earlier he had published an essay on Dewey in a Bulgarian journal [Claparède, E. (1926). John Dewey. Svobodno vaspitanie 2 (May–June 1924), 257–266] (see Donoso, 1994, p. 21).

[5] The German educator Georg Kerschensteiner wrote in almost identical terms about his encounter with Dewey. In a letter to Eduard Spranger he wrote: "Aber Dewey verdanke ich anderen Fragen viel Klarheit, in fast allem dem, was ich *selber* wollte, und dem ich instinktiv zustrebte. Ich bin, glaube ich, kein gelehriger Schüler; ich lerne nur das, wozu es mich von selbst treibt" (Kerschensteiner, quoted in Oelkers, 1993, p. 497).

[6] This specific claim was made by Warnock, though other British politicians and authors have recently expressed similar ideas (see Brehony, 1997, pp. 427–428). Brehony very effectively and very eloquently shows that there is no ground whatsoever for these allegations.

[7] It should be noted that "modernisation" is itself not a concept with a straightforward univocal meaning. Elsewhere (Biesta and Miedema, 1996) we have discussed this in more detail.

[8] As Donoso (1994, p. 5) observes with respect to the case of Chile, the direct or indirect influence Dewey has had, can be explained by the fact "that he translated into an educational philosophy the essence of the aspirations of our time."

[9] Elsewhere one of us has argued that this transformative 'logic' is characteristic of all education (see Biesta, 1998).

[10] It should be noted that besides religous denominations one of the prominent pillars of Dutch society was the socialist pillar.

[11] Wielenga even claimed that Dewey's educational and didactical ideas could be used for "bringing into existence an organic didactics comprehending all aspects of our school activity, objectives, subject-matter, and methodology" (Wielenga, 1953, p. 250). He has never retracted this view as we can find it for instance in the fourth edition of the brochure published in 1967, and in an article entitled "Dewey's philosophy of education" from 1973/74. In his inaugural address he also takes Dewey's comprehensive conception in a formal sense as an example of a harmonious whole, and criticizes "our christian education" (ibid., p. 248) as it still manifests a shortage with respect to building up a consistent, harmonious and elaborated educational structure.

[12] In one of her notes Philippi makes clear that in 1948 she attented a course on Dewey at the University of Leiden with the American philosopher professor W.E. Hocking.

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